

DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR NEWTON CENTRE

The goal of this document is to establish Design Guidelines that will direct future public and private improvements, thereby resulting in a more cohesive, attractive, pedestrian-friendly Newton Centre.

The Design Guidelines are separated into two sections:

A. Public Sector Improvements

B. Private Sector Improvements.

The first section includes recommendations on the design of streets, sidewalks, open space, parking areas, and landscape as well as on the procurement and placement of street furniture, light fixtures, public signage and sidewalk materials. The second section makes recommendations to private property owners on compatible façade treatments, signage, building massing and materials.

The Public Sector Improvements shall be phased to minimize disruption to current businesses, residents and visitors to the Centre. The Private Sector Improvements may be implemented at any time at the property owners' discretion, or they may be required as a condition of the City's approval of a redevelopment project.

A. PUBLIC SECTOR IMPROVEMENTS

Currently no design standards exist for Newton Centre. Sidewalk widths, light fixtures, site elements, and landscape treatments vary greatly throughout the Centre. This document does not recommend that the streetscape in the Centre should be completely uniform, but instead proposes General Guidelines that can be modified to suit the unique character of Newton Centre's distinct areas.

Following the General Guidelines, this document addresses five distinct areas in Newton Centre: Langley and Union Streets (Low traffic streets), Beacon and Centre Streets (High Traffic Streets), the Triangle, Parking Areas, and Open Space. By doing so, this document recognizes the unique function of each of these areas and acknowledges that site elements used in one area may not be entirely appropriate in another area.

1. GENERAL GUIDELINES, *to be followed throughout Newton Centre*

1A. Streets and Sidewalks: *Well-designed streets and sidewalks are vital to the success of Newton Centre. While it is important to preserve ease of vehicular movement, particularly along Beacon and Centre Streets, Newton Centre is also a destination point and the heart of a residential community. It should be a place where people feel they can easily walk between businesses, parks and shops. Street and sidewalk design should support the objective of making a pedestrian oriented environment. Roads, particularly the wider Centre and Beacon Streets should be safe and easy to cross.*



- Build neck-downs (bumped out sidewalks) at all corners of all streets lined with parking spaces to shorten the distance that pedestrians have to cross the road.
- Consolidate pedestrian crosswalks, and mark them with concrete pavers, brick, paint or other special paving. Coordinate the design of the crosswalks with the design of the sidewalks.
- Limit the number of vehicular curb cuts and driveways to enhance pedestrian safety.
- Build 10'-wide raised treed medians along Centre and Beacon Streets to give pedestrians a safe halfway stopping point. Medians also indicate to drivers that they are entering a special place.



- Sidewalk widths will vary from street to street, but shall use a consistent palette of materials and design treatments. Possible paving and curbing materials include Stiles & Hart Boston City Hall paving brick, and Chelmsford Grey Granite.
- Place utilities underground throughout the Centre.



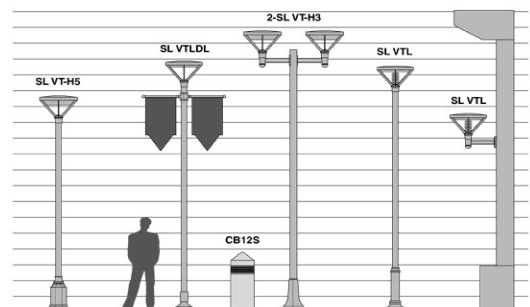
1B. Pedestrian Walkways and Alleys: *Pedestrian Walkways and alleys provide smaller scale routes for pedestrians to navigate the Centre. They should be well lit, safe, and pleasant.*

- Pedestrian walkways and alleys shall be constructed of the same palette of materials as the street sidewalks in Newton Centre. Their design shall incorporate the same light fixtures that are used throughout the Centre. Plantings and street furnishings shall be added wherever possible.
- Sidewalks and entryways shall be added behind those buildings that provide rear public access. These walks and entryways shall be constructed of the same materials as sidewalks along streets.



1C. Lighting: *In addition to providing security, decorative light fixtures help to establish the character of Newton Centre.*

- Use pedestrian-scale light fixtures 10'-14' high, of a simple design that can accommodate arms for planters and banners. Locate fixtures at regular intervals not greater than 70' apart.
- Light fixtures shall meet "Dark Sky" requirements.



1D. Street Furnishings: *Street furnishings - benches, trash receptacles, planters, bollards, newspaper dispensers, bicycle racks, tree grates and directional signage - combine with light fixtures to define the character of a particular place. They furnish a space and invite pedestrian involvement. The style and color of all street furnishings shall be coordinated. All shall be durable and easy to maintain.*



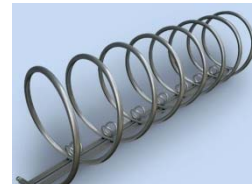
- **Benches** shall be located so that they encourage the enjoyment of specific spaces, whether along sidewalks or in parks. They may face quieter streets to facilitate people-watching, face away from busy streets, or face each other to encourage conversation. They shall be located outside restaurants to provide places for outdoor eating, or in parks to provide places for quiet reading or contemplation.



- **Trash receptacles** shall be installed at regular intervals along streets, at key intersections, close to (but downwind of) groups of benches, and at entrances to parking garages. Coordinate the style of the trash receptacle with the style of the bench. Trash receptacles shall be located a maximum of 60' apart.



- **Bike racks** reduce car traffic and parking demands by encouraging people to bike to the Centre rather than drive. Locate bike racks at transportation nodes (i.e., the T-Stop), major destination points, and public facilities.



- **Newspapers** shall be dispensed from identical looking boxes and shall be located so as not to impede the pedestrian flow.



- **Public Signage:** Clear, consistent, attractive and coordinated signage shall be located throughout the Centre. Directional signs shall be located to help visitors find parking and particular stores and services. Interpretive signs explaining the history of the area shall be mounted in appropriate areas. They can also be combined with orientation maps and community event information on kiosks. Historic plaques shall be mounted on structures of historic or cultural interest.









- **Public Art** shall be incorporated into the streetscape design. Examples of this technique include water features, sculptures, benches, decorative pavings, flagpoles, murals & clocks.



1E. Street Trees: Street trees enrich the appearance and health of an urban environment. Trees shade the streets, sidewalks and buildings, mediate the scale between taller buildings and pedestrians, reduce noise and pollution, and provide shelter for pedestrians.



- Trees shall be planted at consistent intervals along the streets to establish a rhythm and an aesthetic identity to the various areas of Newton Centre. Spacing should be between 20' minimum and 40' maximum, depending on the type of street and the width of the tree canopy. On wide streets with ample sidewalks, large shade trees with high canopies shall be spaced approximately 30' apart. On narrow streets with narrow sidewalks, small trees with narrow canopies shall be spaced approximately 20-25' apart.
- Current technology for tree planting (i.e. structural soil) shall be instituted for trees planted in sidewalks.
- Select named cultivars that are appropriate for the specific site conditions. Small flowering trees appropriate for planting in park areas include:

Common Name	Latin Name	Picture
Autumn Brilliance Serviceberry	Amelanchier x grandiflora 'Autumn Brilliance'	
Eastern Redbud	Cercis canadensis	
Kousa Dogwood	Cornus kousa	
Merrill Magnolia	Magnolia loebneri 'Merrill'	
Crabapple species- 'Adams', 'Centurion', 'Donald Wyman', 'Harvest Gold', 'Prairie Fire', and 'Snowdrift'	Malus species	
Kwanzan Oriental Cherry	Prunus serrulata 'Kwanzan'	
'Ivory Silk' Japanese Tree Lilac	Syringa reticulata 'Ivory Silk'	

Appropriate urban street trees include:

Common Name	Latin Name	Picture
'Autumn Flame' Red Maple	Acer rubrum Autumn Flame	
'Karpick' Red Maple	Acer rubrum Karpick)	
Fastigate European Hornbeam	Carpinus betulus fastigiata	
'Autumn Gold' Ginkgo	Ginkgo biloba 'Autumn Gold'	
'Princeton Sentry' Ginkgo	Ginkgo biloba 'Princeton Sentry'	
'Skyline' Honeylocust	Gleditsia triacanthos 'Skycolor'	
'Chanticleer' Pear	Pyrus calleryana 'Chanticleer'	
Northern Red	Quercus rubra	
Fastigate English Oak	Quercus robur fastigiata	
Regent Scholartree	Sophora japonica 'Regent'	
Valley Forge' Elm	Ulmus americana 'Valley Forge'	
Village Green' Zelkova	Zelkova serrata 'Village Green'	

2. UNION STREET AND LANGLEY ROAD (LOW TRAFFIC STREETS) *Partly due to their one-way vehicular traffic flow, and the shops and restaurants on both Union Street and Langley Road, these streets are currently two of the most pedestrian-friendly streets in the Centre. The goal of these Guidelines is to further enhance their enjoyable character.*

- Streets shall be curbless and paved with decorative pavers to enable their occasional use as a pedestrian mall.
- Sidewalks shall be a minimum of 15'-wide to accommodate outdoor cafes, benches and plantings.
- Along with street trees, street furnishings and light fixtures, decorative flower planters or barrels shall define the street edge and lend the areas a unique identity.
- Flower baskets shall be hung from light poles, to provide color and identity.
- Bench locations shall be a maximum of 40' apart.



3. BEACON AND CENTRE STREETS (HIGH TRAFFIC STREETS) *Beacon and Centre Streets carry the most regional traffic flow throughout the Newton Centre. While it is important to facilitate this flow, drivers should also be signaled that they are entering a vibrant town center.*

- A 10-wide treed median strip underplanted with ground cover shall be added along Centre Street, from Willow Street to Cypress Street, and along Beacon Street from Chesley Road to Centre Street. The median will serve to establish the identity of Newton Centre, and indicate to drivers that they have arrived at a populated center of activity. By dividing the street, the median visually makes the road appear less wide. It will also make it safer for pedestrians to cross.
- The median curb shall be granite and 12 inches high.
- Sidewalks shall be at least 10 feet wide to accommodate pedestrian traffic flow in two directions, window shoppers and a row of trees along the street edge. The branches shall be cut a minimum of 8 feet above the ground to provide adequate clearance and so as not to obscure the building facades and business signs.
- Banners shall be hung from light poles.
- Bench locations shall be a maximum of 70' apart.



4. TRIANGLE *As the physical center of Newton Centre the Triangle is also the heart of the Centre. Instead of being filled with cars, the Triangle will should be filled with people. The Triangle should pulse with activities that attract visitors year-round, including meeting friends, playing ball, shopping, dining, or watching a concert. The pathways within the Triangle serve as arteries carrying pedestrians – the lifeblood of the Centre – safely from one activity to the next both within the Triangle and in the surrounding commercial areas.*



- Perimeter sidewalks along Centre Street shall be 10' wide.
- All other perimeter sidewalks shall be 5' wide.
- Pedestrian pathways within the park will vary in width depending on the expected pedestrian traffic load. (Need to come back to decide this specifically later.)
- The park shall be accessible from all sides, including paths through and around the building and the fountain.
- Defining decorative structures (such as a clock, kiosk or a flagpole) shall be located on the three corners of the triangle.



5. PARKING AREAS *As the first place that a visitor sees, well-landscaped and lighted parking lots and structures can enhance a visitor's experience of Newton Centre*

- Parking lots must meet or exceed landscaping requirements in the Zoning Ordinance §30-19.
- Provide a 4'-wide minimum perimeter of planting between a parking lot and a street or public way. A low decorative fence or wall may also be used. Woven wire fencing (i.e. chain link) may not be used.
- Provide sidewalks to safely move people from parking areas to businesses.
- Light fixtures shall match those fixtures used throughout Newton Centre, and shall be located closely enough to ensure visibility without glare into adjoining properties.
- Ecologically designed drainage swales are highly recommended.



6. PARKS AND OPEN SPACES *offer a respite from the buildings and traffic that characterize any downtown district. They offer a meeting ground for residents and visitors, an open space for community celebrations and events, a quiet bench for employees to lunch, or a garden to enjoy. It is important to have a variety of welcoming parks and plazas throughout Newton Centre to accommodate people's diverse needs*



- Strengthen the connection of Newton Centre with the Newton Centre Playground. Coordinate light fixtures, street trees, trash receptacles, and benches. Particularly enhance the edge of the Playground along Centre Street, as it marks the entrance to Newton Centre from the north. Build a well-marked crosswalk across Centre Street at Tyler Terrace to enable safe pedestrian passage across the street
- Design seating and plantings to take advantage of sun orientation, to protect from winds, and create a variety of inviting and comfortable spaces.
- Plant a variety of large trees, small flowering trees, shrubs and perennials throughout Newton Centre's open spaces. Re-establish the perennial border maintained by Newton Pride.

B. PRIVATE SECTOR IMPROVEMENTS

The City currently has little control over the improvements made to private property in Newton Centre. Adoption of these guidelines for use during the special permit process (or other newly developed process for redevelopment in the Centre) will allow the City to have a hand in ensuring that the master plan vision of Newton Centre will be implemented over time.

Private Sector improvements should be implemented when a property is redeveloped or renovated. City approval of building permits should be conditioned on designs adhering in spirit to these guidelines to ensure that Newton Centre becomes a more cohesive, attractive and pedestrian-friendly environment.

In Newton Centre today, there is not one central architectural theme. Building heights, construction materials, façade treatments and private signage vary greatly. This eclectic character can provide for a visually pleasing and interesting streetscape. These design guidelines do not attempt to discourage this variety, but rather to foster it. Identical buildings and facades would make the Centre look drab and boring – similar to a generic strip mall rather than the diverse commercial center it is and should continue to be. The intent of this document is to give private property owners ample leeway to creatively design buildings and facades that contribute to the overall vibrancy and attractiveness of the Newton Centre streetscape. Rather than dictate one particular design standard, many of the recommendations in these guidelines offer property owners a range of compatible options for design. By doing this, the design of the Centre will continue to be varied, but, at the same time, it will appear more cohesive and organized.

In addition to general guidelines that apply to the entire Centre, this document divides the physical design of Newton Centre into the ***Core Area*** and ***Transition Areas*** (see map below for the boundaries of each area). Because it is important to recognize the diverse characteristics and functions of these areas, unique design guidelines are offered for each category.

1. GENERAL GUIDELINES, to be followed throughout Newton Centre

1A. Site Plan: *The location of a building on its lot and the way it is accessed by the public are vital elements that contribute to the creation of an interesting and pedestrian-friendly streetscape in Newton Centre. A uniform setback from the street encourages pedestrians to easily walk along the sidewalks peering into shop windows and to stop when something catches their eye. Providing on-site parking (if required) in the back of the building*



rather than along the front minimizes pedestrian and vehicular conflicts and allows people to freely and safely move along the sidewalks. Courtyards filled with plantings, furniture and adequate lighting, tucked behind or between buildings provide a pleasant respite for visitors to the Centre. These areas would pleasantly compliment the public parks and open spaces in the Triangle and along Centre Street.

- Facades shall not be built continuously for more than 200' without a minimum 5' break for a pedestrian pass-through (alley).
- Alley walkways shall be constructed of materials similar to those used on adjacent sidewalks and shall be well-lit with similar light fixtures.
- Drive-thru access is prohibited.
- New curb cuts shall not be permitted. If possible, existing curbs shall be consolidated or eliminated (see new zoning for off-site parking).
- Adjacent property owners shall explore opportunities to link access drives behind buildings and share parking across property lines to minimize curb cuts along entire blocks. (See parking plan for options on shared parking).
- On-site parking, if any is provided, shall be located behind buildings and shall meet or exceed landscaping requirements in the City of Newton's Zoning Ordinance §30-19 and Newton Centre Public Sector Design Guidelines Section 5: Parking Areas.
- If on-site parking is provided behind the building, the Owner shall provide a secondary public entrance at the rear of the building.
- If no on-site parking is provided behind the building, the Owner shall provide landscaped seating areas or courtyards behind their buildings. In addition to being accessed from the buildings themselves, these spaces shall be accessible from adjoining alleys and pedestrian walkways.
- Furniture, light fixtures, sidewalks, and plantings in these seating areas/courtyards shall be constructed of a similar palette of materials as the public spaces in Newton Centre.
- Dumpsters shall be screened from parking lots, streets, pedestrian pathways, and adjacent residences.



1B. Buildings: *The streetscape is defined by the buildings that frame it. The types of building materials used and the way they are detailed will enhance the appearance of the architecture and the pedestrian's experience. Façade treatments, dormered windows and/or recessed upper stories often makes a large building appear less massive at the street level. Buildings should be compatible throughout the Centre, but need not be the same height nor constructed with identical materials.*



- Buildings shall conform to Architectural Guidelines contained in the Appendix of this document.
- Buildings shall not be constructed with vinyl siding, opaque or reflective glass, or have stucco finishes.
- Windows shall not be recessed.



1C. Facades: *There is never a second chance to make a first impression and a store's front façade is almost always a potential customer's first impression. Quality building materials, flower boxes, awnings, creative signs and colorful displays all contribute to an attractive and inviting storefront. Passersby are more likely to enter a store if the outside is eye-catching and appealing. Three-dimensional facades with recessed doorways, overhead awnings and projecting signs all add depth and vibrancy to the streetscape. Continual facade maintenance is also vital to ensure that people come back.*



- Each store in a larger building shall have varied, but compatible awnings.
- Where there is public access in back of the building, facades shall be enhanced with signage, plantings and sidewalks.
- At least 50% of the entrance doors shall be glass.
- Multiple store facades in a single building shall be coordinated with similar colors, signage and windows.
- The framing elements, separating individual stores on a building façade, shall continue on the upper stories as well.
- Window boxes and window baskets shall be installed where possible and shall be maintained by owner.



1D. Signs: *Signage is one of the most important elements of a streetscape that can attract customers to the area. Wall signs are a business' primary means of identification and must be large enough to be seen from across the street to advertise their location. In addition, small signs projecting from the façade are noticed by people walking along the sidewalk. They may be more artistic, perhaps providing details about the goods or services a store offers. Signs should be appropriately lit in the evening while the store is closed to entice customers to return during business hours. Lighted signs also enliven the streetscape at night. Signs may have a mix of lettering type and color but should be compatible in size throughout the Centre. As with other streetscape elements, identical signage on adjacent stores is discouraged as it will make Newton Centre look and feel like a strip mall instead of a vibrant, diverse commercial area.*



- Individual signs on the same building or on adjacent buildings should complement each other but shall not be identical in color or materials.
- Internally illuminated signs are prohibited.
- Projecting signs shall be hung 8' over the sidewalk to ensure clearance.
- Projecting signs shall not extend more than 6' from the building façade.
- Design of projecting signs shall coordinate with the building to which it is attached. The bracket shall also be decorative and coordinate in style with the sign itself.
- Window signs shall not be taped to the windows or doors.
- Lettering on first floor windows shall cover no more than 20% of the glass area.

2. SPECIFIC AREA GUIDELINES:

Newton Centre is a prime location for “smart growth” development. Currently, the MBTA stop provides easy access to and from the area and commercial development in the Centre provides ample employment. What the area is presently lacking however is vibrancy in the evenings. During the morning commute as well as during lunchtime the Centre is bustling with activity. If people lived above shops and restaurants, the Centre would be an exciting destination at night as well. A mixed-use development with retail uses on the ground floor and housing or offices on upper stories should be encouraged in Newton Centre. This type of development will bring people to Centre at different times of the day and during different days of the week. Development can also be eco-friendly. A varied mix of stores and services in the Centre would allow people to live there without a car (or one less car). Concentrated density in a few areas opens up more green space elsewhere in the Centre.

Any new development must be well-designed. These guidelines acknowledge that the more intensive development described above is not appropriate in all areas of Newton Centre. The map on page x physically divides the Centre into two distinct categories: *the Core Area* and *Transition Areas*.

2A. Core Area: *The Core Area consists of the streets that face the Triangle (Langley Road, Beacon and Centre Streets). Sixty foot buildings in this area will not overwhelm the streetscape or create a cavernous feeling at street level because they will not directly face other buildings across the street. In addition, a wider range of uses and building types is acceptable in the Core Area because it does not abut the surrounding neighborhoods.*



Site Plan

- Buildings shall have zero setbacks from the adjacent sidewalks along the street.

Buildings

- Buildings shall be a minimum of 36' and a maximum of 60' in height.
- Doorways may be recessed to provide more display space in front windows.

Facades

- Frame each store (or frame at 20' intervals on larger stores).
- Windows within frames shall start at a maximum of 2' from street level and shall be at least 8' high.
- At least 70% of linear footage of the first floor façade should be transparent glass doors or windows.
- Windows shall be plate glass without mullions.
- Buildings with a sign band shall locate it 8' above street level. The sign band shall provide the background for individual business signs.

Signs

- Wall signs shall fit on the sign band if one exists on the building with lettering large enough to be seen from across the street.
- Permanent freestanding signs shall be prohibited.
- Temporary sandwich board signs shall be located so as not to impede pedestrian flow.

2.B Transition Areas: *Transition Areas are blocks further away from the Triangle that are close to or abut residences. Development in these areas shall be less intense in both use and appearance. The height of buildings in the Transition Areas shall gradually step down from the maximum allowed in the Core Area to a height compatible with the adjacent houses. Building materials and uses should also be compatible with the nearby residential neighborhoods.*

Site Plan

- Building setbacks shall be no less than zero feet and no more than 15 feet from the sidewalk.

Buildings

- Buildings shall be a minimum of 24' and a maximum of 48' in height.

Facades

- Windows shall be residential in both size and character.

Signs

- One freestanding sign shall be permitted within the front setback.
- Freestanding signs shall conform to the standards set out in §30-20 of the City of Newton's Zoning Ordinance.